Women in Public Policy Realm:

Performance of Representatives in the Indian Parliament during 2014 to 2024

I. Introduction

Policy is an important element of political process. The balanced participation of men and women in the decision-making process is an essential requirement of democracy. Support for women's participation can be measured by looking at their representation at the executive level as well as the tradition of women's participation in the public sphere. Indian constitution guarantees many of the rights of women, such as those outlined in Articles 14, 15(1), 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(d),39(A), 42, 46, 47, 51(A) and so on, and on Nov 1, 1961, India ratified article 3 of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (UN, 1953) which states "Women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination. Women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life are essential for achieving Sustainable Development goals by 2030. India is also a signatory to The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) for advancing women's rights and gender equality, one of the 12 critical concerns being women in power and decision making. Despite all initiatives, women in India are still unrepresented in all areas of politics.

II. Statement of the Problem

The political empowerment of women is part of overall empowerment process. The political participation of women in the electoral process signifies not just equality and freedom, but also power and choice to make decisions. After the establishment of reservation at the local level, the political participation of women went from 4.5 per cent to 44.4 per cent, far higher than the global average of 34.3 per cent (UN women data), provided women an opportunity to serve as leaders. But, at the national level, political representation of women is very low. The representation of women in the Parliament is 14 per cent (Lok Sabha – 14.94 per cent and Rajya Sabha- 14.05 per cent) and a mere 9 per cent in the Legislative assemblies according to the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and ECI respectively. The representation of women is inadequate and disproportionate to their number in the population (48.8 per cent, census 2011). Historically, women have played a significant role in growth and development of India. Yet, only few women could access to higher positions of power and authority. There was only one-woman Prime Minister, two women Presidents and 15 women Chief Ministers till now, and Mamta Banerjee being the only incumbent Chief Minister.

Women's representation in the Parliament peaked at 15 per cent in 17th Lok Sabha, the highest percentage in India's independent history. 78 out of 545 members in the Lok Sabha and 24 out of 224 members in the Rajya Sabha constitute women. Moreover, the 17th Lok Sabha passed the Women Reservation Bill, 2023, thirty years after reservation was implemented locally. Gender equality in every walk of life has now become an integral part of political mobilisation of Indian women. The contributions of women parliamentarians in parliamentary procedures are in no way less significant than that of their male counterparts in the Indian Parliament. Women parliamentarians have pioneered various items of social legislation which have an

important bearing on the structural aspects of Indian society. They were successful enough in safeguarding the rights of Indian women and in promoting their welfare. Though their preferences are for women's upliftment and child welfare, they have shown keen interest in matters of politics, society, economy, foreign policy and administration.

III. **Review of Literature**

Facts and Figures: Women's leadership and political participation by UN Women data states that women are under-represented at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off. According to their data, 26.5 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower house are women and only six countries have more than 50 per cent or more women in Parliament: Rwanda (61 per cent), Cuba (53 per cent), Nicaragua (52 per cent). India with 15 percent women representation is behind Pakistan (20 per cent) and Bangladesh (21 per cent).

Countries with highest proportion of women MPs have reservation within parties: study (2023). This article published by The Print, if we look at Sweden (46 per cent), South Africa (45 per cent), Australia (38 per cent), France (35 per cent) and Germany (35 per cent) do not have any laws reserving seats for women but political parties provide reservation. The study also claims that reservation of seats would restrict the choice of voters and as an alternative, quota within political parties or the concept of dual member constituencies is an option.

Women voter participation exceeds that of men in 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Times of India – The participation of women as voters has increased throughout the years with voter turnout of females (67.18 per cent) higher than males (67.05 per cent).

Global data – Literacy rate in India (2018-2021) – The literacy rate of women increased by 68 per cent after independence. At the time of independence, the female literacy rate was 9 per cent and currently it is 77 per cent where the male literacy rate is 84.7 per cent. The literacy rate in rural India is low compared to urban areas for both males and females (67.77 per cent), yet the highest improvement in rural women literacy has been observed in the past two decades.

Women's education and women's political participation- UNESCO by Sonia Bhalotra, Irma Clots, Lakshmi Iyer (2013). This article talks on the correlation of women's literacy rate and their political participation. When woman is literate, she has higher political awareness and can make choices, participate in decision-making process and policy determination that affect their needs. The balanced participation of women strengthens democracy by removing causes of disempowerment and creating gender-equal society.

Electoral Participation of Women in India: Key Determinants and Barriers by Praveen Rai for Economic and Political Weekly (2011). In this paper, author explains the key factors for under-representation of women in politics. First is culture where distinct gender roles and lack of political will plays a part. Religion and socio-economic conditions of women can restrict their political career. Standing for elections is extremely costly for a woman.

Role of Congruity Theory of Prejudice towards Female leaders by Eagly, A.H. Steven J Karau (2002), Psychological Review: A role of congruity theory of prejudice towards female leaders proposes that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership leads to two forms of prejudices: (A) Perceiving women less favourably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and (B) evaluating behaviour that fulfils the prescription of a leader role less favourably when enacted by a woman. One consequence is that attitude is less positive towards female than male leaders. Other consequence is it is more difficult for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles.

Work and Power: The connection between Female Labour Force Participation and Female Political Representation, A review essay for the annual review of Political Science by Torben Iversen and Frances Rosenbluth (2008). The female representation in the world's legislature has increased in tandem with the rise of women in female labour force. The higher the number of women in labour force, greater the political mobilisation of women. Through this, society can understand the political interests of women, thereby greater support for women candidates.

Towards equality, cause and consequences of the political prominence of women in India, by Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, Asian Survey. This journal talks of the gross inequalities between male and female in Indian society as a whole testified to or by an imbalanced sex ratio, severe differentials in wages, and a host of other factors. At all levels of political leadership, men greatly outnumber women, in case of elected and appointed administrative positions.

Women's Political Participation and Leadership, Social Development Policy Briefs, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific. This report underscores the

importance of normalising the idea and practise of women holding power. A change in tradition is achieved when more women participate in public life.

Women's Marginal Role in Politics, Indiatogether.org Women in higher positions of power come from highly influential political parties or are single women. Political parties field women only if they are serious candidates.

The Effect of Women's Representation in Parliament and the Passing of Gender Sensitive Policies – This paper examines whether countries having high share of women in Parliament are more likely to pass gender sensitive laws. Study finds that all else equal, developing countries that have a higher share of women parliamentarians are more likely to pass comprehensive laws on sexual harassment, rape, divorce and domestic violence.

The Contribution of Women Parliamentarians in India by D Syamala Devi- Women have held significant positions both in the legislature and government. They have discussed not only the issues concerning women's upliftment, but also other issues of national and international importance. They have introduced many important bills in the Indian Parliament. Voting rights to women were provided, first by the Madras Legislature in 1920. In 1926, Dr. Muthu Lakshmi Reddy became the first woman to be nominated to the Madras Legislative Council. In 1932, many women contested to the elections to the provincial Assemblies and quite a few of them got elected. The first woman to serve in any cabinet was Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. She took special interest in safeguarding public health and sanitation and maternity and child welfare. The contributions made by women parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are quite significant. In the first Lok Sabha, of the 499 seats 22 (4.4 per cent) were won by women

members. Of them, two were appointed as Ministers. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur was the first Cabinet Minister and Maragatham Chandrasekhar, a deputy minister. In the first Lok Sabha women members introduced a large number of private member bills on many important social bills. Notable among them were the Dowry Restraint bill and the Hindu Marriage (Amendment) bill, Suppression of Immoral Traffic and Brothels and The Women's and Children's Institutions (Licensing). The other bills introduced by The Workmen's Compensation Amendment bill, 1955 (insertion of new section 3-A), The Factories (Amendment) bill (substitution of section 59).

From 1952 to 1993, 126 women have become the members of Rajya Sabha. The Hindu Marriage and Divorce bill, 1952, The Hindu Minority and Guardianship bill, 1952, The Hindu Succession bill, 1956 and The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance bill, 1956, these four enactments constitute a complete code on the Hindu law.

Political Empowerment of Women in Indian Legislature by D Syamala Devi, G Lakshmi, The Indian Journal of Political Science – Empowerment is a process that enables women to gain access to, and control of, material, intellectual and human resources. Empowerment is the redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and male dominance. Political empowerment of women is part of overall empowerment process. Improving women's opportunities in the area of decision-making requires long term strategies. They have to be systematic and they must aim at challenging prevailing structures. Some of the strategies include forming a 'critical mass' so as to act as a pressure group in the legislature, devise and promote public campaigns, women forming their own political parties, women's shadow cabinet as in Czech Republic, expansion of educational opportunities for women, etc.

Representation of Women in Legislature: A Sociological Perspective in the Indian Context, S.S. Sree Kumar- The author views that providing reservation through constitutional amendments may lead only to formal representation. Empowering women should not be mere legislation, but efforts should be multidimensional in nature. Among other tasks, one major attempt by them is to spread education among girls especially informal education. This will lead to socialization of women especially in rural areas.

Women in Union Council of Ministers, factly – Common Portfolio of Women Ministers (1952-2019)- Information and Broadcasting, Environment and Forests, Human Resource and Development, Culture, Social Justice and Empowerment, Health and Family Welfare are the common portfolios.

Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a randomized Policy Experiment in India by Raghabendra Chatopadhaya and Esther Duflo (2004) – This journal discusses rational choice model. Here, the voters take into account the role of information in the electoral choice, specifically new information. The voters expect higher payoff and better decision-making capabilities. Here, the choice maybe influenced by party labels, interest groups, endorsements and preferred ideologies. Hence proper political training and education along with acceptance of women candidates within party is important.

The Adoption of Proportional Representation, by Lucas Leeman and Isabela Mares, Columbia University. In this journal, the countries with Proportional Representative System (PR) have higher representation of women than countries with First Past Post System. It also mentions it could not be in every case.

Do Women need Women Representatives? British journal of Political Science. In this article, the author takes up argument between descriptive and substantive representation. The author argues that if men and women have different attitudes at mass level, which are reproduced among political elites, then the numerical under-representation of women may have negative implications to women's substantive representation.

Women MPs' contribution has increased in the Parliament. Data proves it- The Indian Express. Female representatives from the ruling party are asking more questions, have demonstrated a significantly higher level of scrutiny towards their own government, hold their ministries accountable.

Story in numbers: The best show by women candidates is not enough, Business Standard- The 17th Lok Sabha has the highest ever number of women parliamentarians at 78 with 716 women candidates having contested and logging a success rate at 11 per cent. Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have elected the most number of women parliamentarians, 11 each. Maharashtra (8) is the next, followed by Odisha (7) and Gujarat (6).

Analysing the performance of women representatives in the Indian Parliament, International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, Ankitha Ashok Kumar Sengupta, Dr Mohan S Kashikar- The performance of members in Parliament includes those activities which help them influence the legislative process. Parliamentary performance is determined through attendance, the number of debates participated, questions raised and private member's bill

introduced by the respective MPs. Women MPs are conditioned to think it is a privilege to speak in the house, rather than their right as an elected representative. Moreover, highly educated women MPs generally follow their party lines and seldom promote women's viewpoint. Each party is allotted time based on its number in the house, deliberations within party will decide who will speak and on what issues. Generally, senior party members, mostly men, due to their numerical strength are given priority over others. Many times, senior party members consume the maximum amount of time for their speeches leaving very little time for the women MPs.

PRS Legislative Research- Participation of women MPs in Parliamentary debates- Women MPs raised most concerns on the issues concerning health, roads and railways, women's safety, pandemic, floods. The women members who participated the highest in parliamentary debates were Supriya Sule (INC), Rama Devi (BJP), Rekha Varma (BJP).

Political Leadership of women: Constraints and Challenges, Latha A Pandit, The Indian Journal of Political Science- Despite the constitutional provisions, the participation and representation of women in politics is far from satisfactory. The demand for greater representation of women in politics was taken up only after the release of report by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1976. Before this the focus of women's movement was only on improving the socio-economic position of women.

Lessons from 30 years of women's reservation in Panchayats by Sunaina Kumar and Ambar Kumar Ghosh, Observer Research Foundation. Women representatives have played a critical role in redefining local priorities, but their contributions are largely undervalued and neglected.

Quotas have impacted gender-related issues and helped shape policy choices more attuned to women's needs and concerns.

IV. Research Questions

1. How many women representatives get access to positions of power and to what extend this helps reduce gender gap in Parliament?
2. To what extend women representatives/decision maker's performance in different Parliamentary committees and ministerial positions and their participation in debates and discussions on the floor of the houses helps to address women issues?
3. What is the socio-economic background of women parliamentarians with special reference to aspects like their literacy level, social background, profession, and political affiliation?
4. To what extend women capable of managing issues of prime importance to all, including hard core issues of defence, home, foreign affairs, railway, and infrastructure when compared to softer issues like women and child development, health and sanitation, and food processing?
5. What are the attitudes and ideologies of important parties to ensure genuine political participation of women?
6. What are the major barriers to the active political participation of women in Parliament?

V. Objectives

1.To assess the performance of women representatives in debates, deliberation, and questioning on the floor of the house.

2. To analyse the socio-economic background of women parliamentarians.

3. To evaluate the role of women representatives/ decision-maker's in addressing issues of local, national and international importance apart from critical concerns for women like gender discrimination, contraception, abortion, maternity and child care etc.

4. To analyse the attitudes and ideologies of important parties to ensure genuine political participation.

5. To analyse the major barriers to women's political participation in India.

VI. Methodology

The methodology used for this study is both qualitative and quantitative. It employs a mixed-method approach for a descriptive analysis followed by an empirical investigation of the research problem at hand. Data is collected through structured questionnaire (100 women representatives of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) and an interview schedule is also administered to collect data. Data from government publications and websites, NSSO, manifestos of political parties, books and articles are to be used.

VII. Chapterisation

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Political Participation: A theoretical Perspective

Chapter 3: Historical Realities and Constitutional Provisions

Chapter 4: Socio Economic and Political Dimensions of Women Representation: A Field Reality

Chapter 5: Political Engagement and Performance of Women: A Field Reality

Chapter 6: Challenges and Constraints of Women Participation

Chapter 7: Conclusion

VIII. Implications of the Study

Right representation of women happens when there is qualitative representation of women rather quantitative.

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